U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Media Contact:
Bill Taylor, 513-246-0539

For Immediate Release
June 9, 2010

DOE Announces the Completion of Cleanup Activities at GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy's Vallecitos Nuclear Center

Sunol, Calif. – The Department of Energy's (DOE) Environmental Management program announced today that the final shipment of DOE radioactive waste has been removed from the GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy's Vallecitos Nuclear Center, marking the end of cleanup activities at the site. Accelerated by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds, the two-and-a-half year project removed approximately 2,303 cubic feet of radioactive waste from the State of California.

"Thanks to an accelerated shipping campaign, the Recovery Act has helped us meet an important milestone in our cleanup efforts – the safe removal and permanent disposal out of state of all DOE radioactive waste from the Vallecitos site," said Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management Dr. Inés Triay. "The project was successful because of cooperation from the State of California, the Western Governors' Association, and the states along the shipping routes."

A 1,600-acre commercial facility, the Vallecitos Nuclear Center is approximately 40 miles east of San Francisco. Owned by GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy, Vallecitos Nuclear Center is an active facility licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for commercial nuclear research and development. From 1967 to 1975, the Vallecitos Nuclear Center conducted research work for the Atomic Energy Commission's (AEC) Nuclear Energy Program, Fast Breeder Reactor Development Program, and the civilian nuclear power industry.

As the successor to the AEC, DOE was responsible for removing defense-related radioactive waste from a hot cell and a glove box used for government-sponsored research. The hot cell facility is a shielded, confined area used for remote work on radioactive materials. Now that DOE wastes are removed, GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy will be able to reuse the hot cell for research and other commercial nuclear work.

In a cooperative and successful team effort by DOE and GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy, the wastes were properly prepared and packaged for safe transportation by truck to approved waste disposal sites. DOE was responsible for handling the shipping logistics, while GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy funded the preparation and packing of the wastes. Waste types, volumes, and disposal sites included:

- **Remote-Handled Transuranic Waste from Defense Activities:** 705 cubic feet of waste in 94 drums, 32 shipments to DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico;
- **Contact-Handled Transuranic Waste from Defense Activities:** 53 cubic feet in 7 drums, 1 shipment to DOE's Idaho National Laboratory for characterization, repackaging, and interim storage prior to being shipped to WIPP;
- **Low-Level Waste:** 1,521 cubic feet, in 97 drums, 1-glovebox and 5-large storage containers, 3 shipments to the DOE's Nevada Test Site; and
- **Mixed Low-Level Waste:** 24 cubic feet, in 3 drums, 2-small storage containers, 1 shipment to EnergySolutions' Clive, Utah Facility.

TRU waste, a byproduct of the nation's nuclear defense program, consists of tools, rags, protective clothing, sludge, soil and other materials contaminated with radioactive elements that have atomic numbers greater than uranium. Contact-handled waste does not require shielding to safely handle, transport and emplace. Remote-handled waste is shipped in shielded containers and emplaced within the walls of the WIPP underground repository due to its higher radiation dose rates.

The DOE Office of Environmental Management is responsible for the largest nuclear environmental cleanup project in the world. After five decades of nuclear weapons production, the legacy of the Cold War has left 1.5 million cubic meters of solid waste and 88 million gallons of liquid waste to be dispositioned.

-DOE-